

PIETY
THE
Best Rule
OF
ORTHODOXY.

OR,
An Essay upon this Proposition :
That the Conduciveness of Do-
ctrines to Holiness or Vice, is the
best Rule for private Christians
to judge the Truth or Falshood
of them by.

*In a Letter to his Honoured Friend
H. M.*

Σύμβολον τῆτο γνήσιον & ἀληθείας, &c.
Clem. Alexand.

*By Hen. Hesketh, Vicar of S. Hellens,
and Chaplain to his Majesty.*

L O N D O N,
Printed for Walter Kettisby, at the Bishops-Head
in S. Paul's Church-yard, 1680.

Henry Wingrove
Born at pens
in Buckinghamshire

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THE INTRODUCTION.

Dear Sir,

Amongst those very many Sweet and Gustful Relishes that the Sense of your Friendship leaves upon my Spirits, The fresh discoveries that I every day make of your real worth and Goodness, is truly the greatest.

And certainly that man oweth much to Providence, and his recognitions to it, can hardly equal the Blessing, that hath the good hap to contract Intimacies and Friendships, of which he finds no reasons afterwards to repent and be ashamed, and to which he needs not study to put any Interruptions. And this is the case of every man who hath a worthy man, and a good man to his Friend, and it is at present mine.

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Sir, I do not intend to flatter you in this, I know that would be the surest way to make my self more unworthy of such a felicity than I am. Nor do I intend to take the measures of your worth from any things, but such as are certain, and will assure such deductions. I do not proclaim you worthy and Good because you are rich, and kind, and affable, and courteous, and studious as becomes a Philosopher :

But I do this because you are concern'd for Religion, and are tender of mens Eternal Interests, and have a dear respect to Souls, and would have all men partake of those felicities, of which your great Piety procures you many blessed Antepasts now, and perseverance in that piety will assure your full and perfect fruition afterwards.

And truly Sir, these are things which in every age have reflected honour upon men, but will much more do so in this. For a Gentleman to retain any sense of Religion now, when unconcernedness for it is so much the mode, and scoffing at every thing that

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is Sacred, so much the common entertainment, and so hugely gratifying to the *Genius* of the Age. To be solicitous for humane Souls, when so many are ready to question whether they have any or no; and of those that profess to believe they have, yet so very few are pleased to have any regards for their welfare. To be studying and contriving helps and advantages for them in their progress to Heaven, when the disbelief of any future state hath so much obtained, and when it is counted wit, and a *specimen* of parts, to buffoon and droll all thoughts of it out of the breasts of men.

To do all these things with sincerity and zeal, which perhaps will meet with no better entertainment than derision or scorn, is certainly an evidence of a great and fixed goodness, and renders you little less worthy of that praise, which the Spirit of God was pleased to give *Job* for being perfect at *Luz*, and *Lot* for retaining his purity in *Sodom*.

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I shall not so far trespass upon your Humility and Modesty as to mention all the Instances, in which these things discover themselves. This that your present commands (for so I always interpret a Friends desires) require of me, is alone enough. It is to give you my thoughts, what I judge to be the best Criterion of truth, and by what marks a man might most certainly discover it, in this mist, and great dust, that the eager Contentions, and tumultuous disputings of men have raised about it, and obscured it in : And by what methods a private Christian should proceed in this amazing diversity of Opinions, and from whence take his measures of truth and safety.

This is (if I mistake not much) an act of such kindness, that it is not easie for you to shew, or men to receive a greater ; and if I can do any service towards reallizing the effects of it, I do not well know many instances, in which I may more safely rejoyce.

And truly as for that reason I do the more willingly, so for another I can the

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the more easily comply with your commands, and minister something towards this great purpose, because it so falls out, that I shall but recollect my thoughts, and transcribe (with very little variation) what I have delivered not long ago in my own Congregation on this subject. And therefore I must beg you to accept some Sermon-Notes instead of a formal Letter, and to pardon me, that I address to you as one of my own People. Only Sir, my respects will not suffer me to thrust you into the common croud; something will be added which was not then delivered, and you will perceive it, by being addressed only to your self.

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PIETY

The Best Rule of

ORTHODOXY.

CHAP. I.

The great need of every Christians taking heed of Error. The difficulty in our present circumstances of doing so. The greatness of that Charity that endeavours to assist in order thereunto. The pitching upon a Rule whereby every man may do, from that place of the Apostle S. John, 1 John 4. 6.

HE that seriously considers what the condition of Religion is at this day in that part of the World that calls it self Christian;

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Christian ; how almost all the Congregations therein are divided among themselves, and have considerable differences upon the account of which they separate each from other, forming themselves into distinct Societies, according to their different Sentiments, and ways of Worship.

And withal considers how confident all parties are of the truth and safety of their own way, with how much clamour and noise they plead for it, and with how much confidence they declaim against all that is opposite to it. While he is certain that some (yea a great many) of them are certainly mistaken ; it being impossible that so many, and so very contrary ways should all be true.

He, I say, that seriously considers all this, may very well subscribe to the reasonableness of that excellent advice of our Blessed Lord, when predicting these things, *Take heed and beware that no man deceive you ;*
Mat. 24. 4.
And may very well look upon the Ingemination, not only as design-
ed

ed to enhance his care that he be not deceived; but as an intimation also how difficult it will be to avoid his being so.

And truly he that hath any due regard to his own Soul, or any just sense of the present state of things, must needs subscribe to the justness of the Ingemination upon both accounts.

For the welfare of the Soul in all its actings, doth mightily depend upon the Principles that it chuseth to act by, and these are only then safe, when they are the results of a sound and right judgment, which that judgment can never be, that is Imposed upon by deceit, and cheated by Error. So that the necessity of attending unto the Caution upon that sole account is very great.

And yet that necessity is heightened much by the other, for where there are various ways that offer themselves to us, and none of these want their specious pretences, but are recommended to us with all possible art and confidence, there the chusing and hitting upon

upon the right, must needs be difficult, and the avoiding deception not very easie.

The Consideration of these two things, hath caused me oftentimes, with some more than ordinary concern, to reflect upon the Condition of a private ordinary Christian at this time, and with a great deal of pity, to compare his state, to that of a Traveller in an unknown road, full of many various and different turnings, which must not only needs distract and puzzle his thoughts which of them to chuse, but create in him a great deal of fear lest he chuse amiss.

And as compassion naturally engageth to charity, and pitying a mans misery prompts us to thoughts how to redress it: So I have many times thought with my self, that man would do a good office, and a thing hugely conducive to the welfare of men, that could pitch upon and prescribe a way, how to remedy this great Inconvenience with ease and safety.

For

For as the erecting the *Statue Mercuriales* (by the Ancient Romans) in all common Roads, upon which were not only steps by which Travellers might mount their Beasts and go on, but inscriptions also to direct them which were the right paths, was then accounted, and is to this day remembred as a very high instance of the kindness and candor of that great people. So certainly the doing the like in this case for the poor Christian Traveller, would be so much the greater instance of charity, by how much his way is more perplex'd and intricate, and the danger of his erring the greater and more momentous.

He that shall undertake to do this for him, may well expect his prayers for his success, and if he should erre in doing his utmost in it, may as well hope for his compassion and pardon: If it can be done, it is really a great benefit, and the design of it a great charity; and if a man chance to erre in it, yet an error that results from charity, may well expect a gentle and candid censure.

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How to do this hath been a thing that hath long lain upon my thoughts, and a case that I have much consulted about, I have been thinking what expedient to pitch upon, what to substitute that might bear the stress of such an Enquiry, what Oracle to erect, to which men might safely commit the resolution of all difficulties of this nature, and with confidence repair unto, for a full and safe satisfaction in them.

What the issue of all these consultations and thoughts hath been I have determined (this *Lent*) to acquaint you withal. And I shall take the rise of what I purpose to deliver to you of this nature, from the words of *1 John 4. 6.* the great *S. John*, who lived to see the actual accomplishment of his Lord's great prediction, that false Prophets should come into the world, and had the honour to be the great prescriber of Antidotes against the infection of those deceivers. And in that very place where he purposely undertakes this, doth prescribe what I am now going to insist upon as

a sure remedy, a certain Criterion by which we may judge: *Hereby know we the Spirit of truth, and the Spirit of error.*

CHAP. II.

The Collection drawn from the preceeding Text. Piety the best Rule of Orthodoxy. The sense in which the Proposition is to be understood. Two Postulata's in order to the proof of it. God hath provided such a Rule for men to judge by, and the reasons urging a belief that he hath done so. This Rule must be for the benefit and guidance of all men.

FOR these words of S. John, I think we may safely draw this Collection, *Piety is the best Rule of Orthodoxy,* or plainer thus, *The Conduciueness of Doctrines unto Godliness is the best and safest Rule by which to judge the truth of them.*

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But before I enter immediately upon the larger handling of this Proposition, I shall stay you a little while, that I may give you the full of what I mean, when I thus speak. For as the Text speaks both of the Spirit of truth and of error, so I shall understand the Proposition both ways, with reference to both these.

1. Directly and positively. The Spirit of truth enclines to holiness, and every doctrine that proceeds from this Spirit, doth some way or other conduce to that great end. And when doctrines, upon trial, are found to be subservient to make men good and regularly holy, then they bear the stamp and impress of truth upon them, and this is a safe way by which to judge the truth of them, and conclude them Orthodox.

2. Oppositely or negatively. Whatever Doctrine or Opinion doth tend to the contrary, either teaching or encouraging sin and disobedience in all or in any one particular instance of it, is certainly false, and proceeds from the Spirit

rit of Error, and let men be never so zealous for it, and confident in recommending and obtruding of it upon others, yet this is a sufficient warrant for every private Christian to reject it, and condemn it as spurious and dangerous: For the Spirit of Error inclines men to disobedience, and whatever doctrine doth so, doth proceed from it.

3. Comparatively. Thus where different Doctrines and Opinions offer themselves to us, it is a safe way to examine carefully which of them conduceth mostly to make men good, and accordingly to make our estimate of them; accepting that which is best attended with holiness, and a necessity of it, and rejecting that which is any way failing herein.

And now by this you may see my sense of the Proposition, how I make obedience and holiness the Shekel of the Sanctuary, by which all other measures are to be tried. I make Gods Law not only the Rule of what ought to be done, but I would have every thing that is to be believed brought un-

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to it, examin'd how it comports with it, and is subservient to the great design of it, and according either to be accepted or rejected.

But before I come to shew the truth and reasonableness of this Assertion, and to prove this to be the safest Rule for all Christians to judge and examine Truth and Error by; there are Two things which I shall lay down as *Postulata's*, or things intimated to us from this Text, and of great advantage in order to the assuring the truth of the great Proposition.

1. That God hath left us some Rule to judge the truth and falshood of Opinions and Doctrines by.

2. That this Rule is obvious and plain, and intended for the guidance and benefit of all men.

1. That God hath not left us without some sure Rule to judge the truth and falshood of Opinions and Doctrines by: This is a truth, which no man that hath any honourable and becoming Sentiments of the goodness and wisdom of God, can in any measure doubt of.

of. He whose gracious Providence watcheth over all things, certainly is regardful also of man. He that hath implanted and put such an instinct into the nature of all other things, as enables them to know what is beneficial and hurtful to their respective natures, and according to pursue and embrace the one, and avoid and arm themselves against the other; hath certainly not been wanting to man in this great Instance, but enabled him to discern truth from falshood, as well as good from evil, and to do both these in Morality as well as Nature, *i. e.* to judge for his Soul as well as his Body.

And the truth is, if it were otherwise, man were of all things certainly the most miserable, and a Religious man were the most miserable and pitiable above all other men. And it would reflect great dishonour upon God, to provide for the safety and conduct of man in all his little concerns; but to leave him wholly unprovided for, and exposed to deception in that which is the most sublime and momentous of

all. And such (we know) is his Religion, it being the way in which he is to serve his God, and assure his blisful love and favour, and thereby secure the Everlasting welfare and happiness of his Soul.

I shall only desire Two things further to be considered in this case.

1. That God hath plainly told us, that there ever will be Errors in the world, and that no age shall want Impostors and deceivers to broach them, and endeavour to entrap people with them: This he hath resolved (for wise ends) to permit still to be.

And can it then be supposed, that God should not furnish his servants with an Antidote against them? Can any think so unworthily of God, as to believe that he hath exposed the beloved of his Soul, and the objects of his tenderest compassions and regards naked and wholly defenceless, without any thing to secure themselves against these plagues? This were indeed to overact the savage cruelty of the *Hircanian Tiger*, and transcribe the weakness

ness of the silly *Ostrich*, which leaveth her Eggs in the Sand, exposed to the foot of every Beast or Traveller, to be crushed at pleasure : Nothing can well be thought of, that is really more injurious and reflective upon Divine Providence than this is.

2. God hath not only told us of these things, but cautioned us against them, and strictly commanded us to beware of them, as is evident to any that consults the holy Scriptures.

Now can it enter into the hearts of men to believe, that God that commands this, should not provide some way by which it might be done ? I could never yet (though educated when such doctrines were much in vogue) bring my thoughts quietly to believe that God would command utter impossibilities ; which were far to exceed the cruelty of the *Egyptian* Taskmasters, which himself hath condemned, and so tragically declaimed against : And I no way doubt, but that if he have commanded us to prove all things,

things, to try the Spirits, to keep our selves from being infected with the error of the wicked; that he hath also furnished us with power, and provided a means, how we may do all these things.

God certainly never commands things in vain, nor will he tantalize the endeavours of his people, nor make himself sport to illude the hopes and endeavours of poor mortals, by putting them upon Acquists whose glories though they may excite, yet their impossibilities do discourage, and frustrate the most vigorous endeavours. And that man would have a strange notion of God, that would fancy his commanding us to take heed of being deceived, and yet not direct us to means by which we might do so.

2. That this Rule is obvious and plain, and intended for the guidance and benefit of all men. *Hereby know we, &c.* And certainly he intends not hereby only himself, or Apostles like himself, but all those whom in *verse 1.* he had exhorted to try the Spirits, and not presently to believe every pretence of

of it, which is equally the interest and duty of all men.

It is true the Priests lips should preserve knowledge, and 'tis well when they do, and in many cases mighty prudent to seek the Law at his mouth, consult him often in our doubts and difficulties, and not be too peremptory in our own conclusions.

But yet I think no man can with reason believe, that God ever intended these to be the only Oracles, to which every Christian should repair and content himself with the responses of. I think, I could urge inconveniences against this, which the whole Conclave would be something puzzled to solve.

As God hath endued every man with a Soul, and that Soul with an understanding, and that understanding with power of judging and discerning things that differ, and commanded every man to be faithful to this Talent, and diligent in improving and encreasing his stock of light, that thereby he may be able to take the better heed he
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be not deceived: So doubtless he hath substituted a way by which every man may do this; and hath not intended the benefit of it to be confined only to some few particular persons.

It hath been long since objected, and designed to reproach the holy Scriptures, that they are very plain, and content themselves with familiar representations of things, accommodated to vulgar capacities, and not fit to satisfy the enquiries and exercise the curiosity of deep speculators, and subtil Philosophers.

And the truth of the objection hath been willingly granted (as to the main) and yet the honour and excellency of them for that reason vindicated, and Gods goodness thereupon magnified and exalted, who foreseeing that the greatest part of his followers would not be great Clerks, and deep Scholars, but illiterate and plain men, hath mercifully consulted their weakness, and complied with it, and provided for it.

And

And he that considers that God values the Soul of one man, equally with anothers, and desires equally the Salvation of all, will presently conclude, that therefore he hath consulted the benefit of all men, and not set up a rule to judge truth by, which should be mighty obscure and intricate, and very few (only some learned men) should be able to reap benefit from.

Thus much therefore we have gained from this Text, both that God hath left us a way by which to know Truth from Error, and that this is such a way as all men may improve, and make use of to the same end.

1. By Scripture.
 2. By Reason and Argument.
1. I begin with the confirmation of this from holy Scripture, which indeed is the chiefest way of proving truth, and before all other things to determine this controversy. For since we have reason with all due humility to acknowledge this to

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Two ways propounded for the proof of the Assertion, Scripture and Reason. This Text improved largely to this purpose, (and Matth. 7. 16. of which) a full Explication is endeavour'd.

HAVING thus prepared the way to the proof of the forenamed Assertion in the preceding Chapter; I shall now address directly to it in this. And two ways I shall endeavour to give strength to the truth of it by :

1. By Scripture.
2. By Reason and Argument, warranted by Scripture.

1. I begin with the confirmation of this from holy Scripture, which indeed is the chiefest way of proving this truth, and before all other things fit to determine this controversie. For since we have reason with all due humility and gratitude to acknowledge this to be

be a full, sufficient and perfect revelation of the will of God to man, in which all necessary directions to happiness are contained, and whatever else is needful to make the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, as *2 Tim. 3. 17.* S. Paul warrants us to believe: So if God have provided such a way for men to judge Truth and Error by, he hath doubtless given some intimation of it in these Divine Inspirations and Records.

Now what these speak of this matter I shall endeavour to acquaint you. And first, as from this place of S. John I have taken occasion to raise, so I shall now try what there is in it, to confirm the Assertion. Which that I may distinctly and clearly do, I must desire you to read the precedent verses, and consider what the Apostle is designing in them. And that you will easily find to be this, an endeavour to confirm those he writes to, in the true faith of Christ, that they might not be

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be drawn from it by any pretences, and particularly by those great pretences to the Spirit, that were then so common amongst all seducers, especially the *Gnosticks*, as indeed it hath been ordinary ever since almost amongst all Hereticks that have infested the Church.

This caution of not believing all these pretences he expressly mentions *verse 1.* and by an excellent Argument enforceth, because there are many false Prophets are gone out into the world.

Now in order to this trial and discovery of the Spirits and the Doctrines issuing from them, he layeth down these three chief rules in the following discourse.

The first whereof is the free confessing of *Jesus* Christ, and faith in him in times of persecution, the lawfulness and prudence of denying of whom, when trouble and danger threatned a man for so doing, was one of the great doctrines of the *Gnosticks*: This he treats of *verse 2, 3.* and then subjoyns a commendation of these Christians,
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and congratulates with them, that they had avoided the infection of these false teachers, shewing withal, what had assisted them to do so, and why they should persist in their care against them, *verse 4, 5.*

The second rule is laid down in this Text ; the intendment of which I shall presently acquaint you more fully with.

But because this is general, he instanceth thirdly in a particular of Christian purity and obedience, *viz.* true charity to our Brethren, which he insists on in the following part of the Chapter.

I am not concern'd to insist upon either the first or third rule so as largely to explain them, but chiefly upon the second, for the ensuring of which, there needs but only the right understanding of the word, *Hear* : He that is of God *heareth* us : And that by this expression is intended, *obeying*, cannot seem strange to any, that will remember, that it is the common word by which obedience is generally expressed in the Sacred *Idiom*. The places in

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which it is thus used are too many to be named, and the commonness of the phrase too great to need it.

So that by *hearing us*, is meant obeying our doctrine, which is of God (as he speaks) *i. e.* pure and holy like its blessed Author, hath nothing of worldly greatness, or secular interest and design in it; but only of piety, and purity, and self-denial, and contempt of the world, &c. and this is an argument of its being truly Divine, and a Rule by which also to judge whatever doctrine is so, or the contrary. That doctrine that is truly of God, is all for holiness, and obedience, and purity, while the other is for worldly advantages, and suited to common Interests, and hereby know we the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error in all instances of doctrines, *i. e.* all doctrines that are conducive to real holiness, are of God, proceed from the Spirit of Truth, and every doctrine that inclines to the contrary doth certainly proceed from the Spirit of Error.

Now

Now if you think that I am injurious in referring thus the trial of Spirits and doctrines only to this one Rule, while I have told you before that *S. John* layeth down Two more in this Chapter to the same purpose ; I shall readily confess the charge, but without any Imputation of injustice: yea, shall take advantage from hence the more to strengthen this Assertion, and to lay down this as the chief and principal Rule, forasmuch as both the others do relate to it, and are instances of it. For a free undaunted confessing of Christ in times of danger, and loving cordially our Brethren, are both of them chief branches of Christian vertue and holiness, and indeed as they are almost above all other things commanded by our Saviour, so they have the choicest and most endearing encouragements annexed to them.

So then the Argument from this place will be very clear and concluding ; for in that very place where *S. John* enjoyns the trial of Spirits and Doctrines, he layeth down this as the great Rule

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for that trial, and though he add Two other Rules also, yet they are but particulars and branches of this great one. And then the whole of the Apostles directions in this case, amounts to thus much, Whatever doctrine doth conduce to make men truly holy, especially encourageth to the right taking up the Cross of Christ, and a cordial constant love to our Brethren, that doctrine issueth from the Spirit of Truth; and whatever doctrine is contrary either to these Two single Christian virtues, or to it in general, doth certainly proceed from the Spirit of Error: and this I take to be the natural and true purport of S. *John* in this Text.

But I would not have you think that he is singular in this, or without good authority for what he saith, we shall find he had sufficient warrant from his great Master Christ *Jesus*, as we may clearly see, if we consider that speech of Christ, By *Mat. 7. 16, 20.* *their fruits ye shall know them.* — In the preceding Verses our Saviour is forewarning his Disciples of the

the coming of false Prophets into the world, and of the very specious pretences that they should make to deceive people by : Having done this and caution'd against them, he layeth down in this place a Rule to know and discover them by, which Rule is very positive and plain, and twice repeated, that we should not doubt of it, or forget it. *By their fruits ye shall know them; i.e.* by the natural consequences and fruits of their doctrines, by such conclusions as do naturally and by right arguing follow from them.

So that the trial of Prophets is to be made by trial of their doctrines, and these are to be tried by the natural consequences and effects of them : not by what a man can discover in the professors or venters of such doctrines, for these many times are very close and subtil Hypocrites, and lead their lives with very great heed and wariness, wearing the Sheeps skin to conceal the Wolfs heart, and always putting on the form of godliness to cover their malicious and rotten designs, and no

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wonder, for Satan can transform himself into an Angel of light : --- but by the natural consequences and effects of the doctrines.

For otherwise it were almost utterly impossible to make a discovery of doctrines by this Rule, since all men do not live up exactly to the consequences of their own Tenets. One man may have a right faith, and yet lead a wicked life ; and another may have a rotten false belief in some particulars, and yet be tolerably well in his life. And there is no doubt, but many a well-meaning man may embrace an Error in simplicity, without understanding rightly what the mischievous consequences of it are, yea perhaps without ever practising those consequences. Men may be honest, and yet careless, and be imposed upon, and so on the contrary too ; but I shall say more to this hereafter.

In the mean time, we may rest satisfied that our Saviour means by fruits, such things as are the natural consequences, and proper products of such doctrines :

doctrines: and this he clears and assures the truth and reasonableness of, by an excellent and well known comparison, and indeed it holds true both ways, men do not gather Grapes from Thorns, nor Figs from Thistles, nor do Vines yield the Berries of Thorns, nor doth the Doune of Thistles grow upon Fig-trees. For though it be possible (and God knows too common too) for a man to detain the truth in unrighteousness, yet the unrighteousness issues from the man, not from the truth. And though a Heretick may possibly be eminent in some good things, yet his heart is to be praised for it, not his head, *i. e.* his goodness is not the effect of his Error, nor upon any account at all ascribable to it.

Rom. i. 18.

So then if we keep us to our Saviours sense, the Rule is true, and will never deceive us. Those doctrines that design nothing, but to make men pure and holy, and conscientious, and strictly regardful of our Christian duty, cannot but issue from the Spirit of Truth,

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Truth, and Satan can never be contributive to a doctrine that tends so much to the overthrow of his design and great Interest in the world. But whatever doctrines or broachers of them, do any way infuse into men, or encourage and prompt them to any Impiety, any Sin, let their shews be never so specious, their pretences never so fair, yet those Prophets are false Prophets, and those doctrines fumes from Hell, whose great design it is to corrupt mens manners, debauch their lives, and keep them from the love and practice of piety.

This is all that I have to offer from these Two places of the New Testament, and truly I think what hath been offered, enough to confirm the Collection, and to gain the assent of every good Christian to the truth of it.

CHAP. IV.

The old Testament cited also for the proof of this, and two great considerations added to give more Evidence to it. This the rule to try Prophets by of old, and the best Criterion of a true Divine Miracle.

THE former Chapter having acquainted you with some proofs for this out of the New Testament, I shall proceed to add some to them also out of the Old : For this is no new thing, nor unknown to the Jews in time of old, but it was deliver'd to them also, as the great Rule to judge by in this case : of which I take that place of the Prophet to be clear evidence ; *To the Law and to the Testimony, and if they speak not according to this Rule, it is because there is no light in them.* In the preceding Verses the Prophet

Prophet is inveighing against and condemning the attending to any extraordinary pretenders to knowledge or revelations, such as Wizards and Necromancers, and those that consulted familiar Spirits : And in this Verse he layeth down a Rule by which to try all revelations and pretences of knowledge ; bring them to the *Law* and to the *Testimony*, and if in any thing they differ from that, then there is no morning or light in them, but they arise out of the infernal *specus*, and are suggested by the Spirit and Prince of darkness.

This seems to me to be very clear, and yet I shall add something more, that this was not only appointed to be the Rule of judging in all ordinary differences about doctrines, but in the most extraordinary also that could possibly happen. I shall instance in Two that were the chiefest of all, --- pretensions to Prophecy and working of Miracles.

These were indeed extraordinary cases, and therefore, though the judging
of

of them did not belong to every private man, but only to the great Sanhedrim, (as learned men have clearly proved) yet it will be very much to our purpose, if we can prove that even this great Consistory was to judge by this Rule, of the Truth or Falshood of both of them.

And first for Prophets, I think the case is sufficiently clear from that place of *Moses*, *Dent.* 13. from *verse* 1, to 6. from which (if you read and consider it well) you will be able to make this Collection, that neither the predicting of a future Event, no nor the coming of that to pass according to the prediction, are safe and warrantable things to judge a Prophet by: for if that Prophet entice any way to Idolatry, or deliver any thing that may draw them away from their duty, in walking after the Lord, and fearing him, and keeping his Commandments, and obeying his voice, he is to be rejected, yea to be stoned as an Impostor, and a deceiver. So that the truth of the Prophet, and the divinity of his Prophecy was

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was to be judged only (or at least chiefly) by the consonancy thereof to the Law of God.

This is a thing that I judge worth our taking notice of at this time : Alas, if the bold pretenders to prophecy in this Age could make this plea for themselves, that things fall out exactly according to their predictions, what a great noise would they soon make ? how mightily would they boast ? and plead (and perhaps believe too) themselves to be true Prophets ? And yet God himself tells us, this is no safe and sure Rule to judge men true Prophets by.

For the Spirit of Error may possibly predict many things, and the Events answer the predictions, and many times we know it hath been thus. And we do not know how far the skill of the Devil may extend in this matter.

Besides, God hath told us, that he many times permits such things to come to pass, that he may thereby try the love and fidelity of men : Cause these
these

these to be a punishment unto all those that are unreasonably fickle and unconstant, and on the other hand, that (as the Apostle speaks in case of Heresies) those that are cordial and approved may be made known. 1 Cor. 11. 19.

I know there are many Rules laid down by the *Jewish* Rabbies, and others after them for the trial of Prophets, and a great stir made about them: But he that will considerately read them over, as he will find this always mentioned as one Rule, so he will find that it is the chiefest and safest, and that to which all at last are forced to flee.

The Second case that I chose to instance in was the case of Miracles: for that there are true and lying wonders, the Scripture clearly assures us. But how to distinguish betwixt these, is really a very great and perplexing difficulty, and some men have taken a great deal of pains to give directions herein: And indeed must do so still, until they come to fix and rest upon this.

For

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For when all is done, this certainly is the easiest and safest too, namely, to consider what the effects and designs of them are, if they have Divine effects upon men, especially if they only design to make men holy and good, or to attest a doctrine that teacheth men how to be so; then they carry the clearest stamp of Divinity upon them that can be: but if they tend in any measure to the contrary, either to encourage men in sin, or attest any doctrine, that teacheth any thing contrary to the holy Law and Precepts of God, then they are to be suspected and rejected as immediate effects of the Spirit of delusion.

C H A P. V.

A further discourse of Miracles, and of their Evidence, and how to know which are Divine, and which not. An addition to all from the Nature of Heresie, and wherein the Notion of it doth chiefly consist.

BUT this Sir, may perhaps by you be thought too little to be said on this great subject of Miracles ; for the whole World doth look upon them to be Divine Testimonies, sufficient Evidences of truth, and able to assure the verity, gain assent to, and entertainment of any doctrine that they are intended to attest. The Christian Church in all Ages hath spoken great things of them, and gloried in them, and argued (with great assurance) the Divinity and Truth of the Christian Religion from them. And he would certainly do a great disservice to Christianity,

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ftianity, that should go about in any measure to weaken the testimony of them.

And therefore Sir, that I may not suffer under any of these prejudices, I shall a little further enlarge this discourse of them, and what I have to say, that it may be distinct and plain, shall be contained in these subsequent propositions.

1. I do most readily grant, and cordially believe that *Divine* Miracles are certain Evidences of Truth: For it is no way reasonable to suppose, that God should annex his Seal to attest any thing that is untrue. Whatever God asserts, must needs for that very reason be true, were there none else; and all the World is agreed in their belief of this. So that I take it, Miracles are not added to confirm the truth of what God hath declared, but rather to convince men that he doth declare such things, or to attest the Divine Commission of those that are his Instruments therein.

2. But

2. But then secondly, I do as assuredly believe that they are not the only Evidences of truth. A Divine doctrine may carry in it many things, that may be as clear signatures, and ought to be as convincing characters of Truth, as immediate Miracles are. This may in some measure be collected from that parabolical discourse of *Abraham* to the rich man in Hell: *If they believe not* Luke 16. 31. *Moses and the Prophets,* *neither will they believe though one rise from the dead.* Intimating that those doctrines in *Moses*, and the Prophetick writings, had as much Evidence of Truth, and as clear Convictions thereof in them, as the miraculous appearance of one from the dead could give to them.

But there is a clearer place in the Gospel to assure this upon, for our Saviour doth in one place, *viz. John 15. 22.* as much aggravate the guilt of the *Jews* Infidelity, in not believing his heavenly pure doctrine, as he doth in another, *viz. verse the 24. of the same*

Chapter: For their not believing the unparalell'd Miracles which he did among them, which certainly he would never have done, but that the Evidences and Convictions of truth were equal in both.

3. But then thirdly, I add that every Miracle is not an unquestionable Evidence of truth, nor a sufficient warrant for men presently to believe upon its sole account: All the world, I think, is agreed about this also: For all men unanimously believe that only true and really Divine Miracles are sufficient to assure the credibility of things. And all Miracles are not so; for there are lying wonders as well as true, and it is not safe to believe equally in both cases.

4. And therefore fourthly, there is an absolute necessity, that a man be assured the Miracle is truly Divine, before he can safely believe upon the authority thereof; otherwise he may believe the lying wonder as well as the other, and believe what *Jannes and Jambres* say as well as *Moses*.

ing. It is so very difficult, that it is almost next to impossible, by any thing immediately in the Miracles themselves, to know which is truly Divine, and which is not so: I say in the Miracles themselves: I mean they do not carry such signatures upon them, that a man by them only, can easily make a judgment.

I have no reason to doubt, but that evil Spirits by God's permission, may effect things that are truly miraculous, or if you require it plainly, true Miracles. For my part, I do not see any reason, why the same things done by the forenamed Sorcerers, were not as true Miracles, as when done by *Moses*, and it will be hard for any man to shew a difference. If the turning a Rod into a Serpent was a Miracle, they did it as well as *Moses*. If converting water into blood was a Miracle, it was so when done by them, as well as when done by *Moses*: and though it be true, that *Moses* did some Miracles, which they could not, yet that relieves us little; for though they did not all Mi-

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acles which he did, yet they did some. So that still they wrought true Miracles as well as *Moses*.

2. Nor secondly, shall men be relieved by saying some are lying wonders and some are true: For it is probable, those wonders are called lying wonders, not because they were not really wonders (or Miracles, for the word signifieth equally both) but because they were designed to attest an untruth, a lie: For so the *Greek* seems *1 Theff. 2. 9.* especially to mean, *ψευδεις*, miracles or wonders of falshood, as our own Translators put it in the Margent; and so the learned *Grotius* expounds it, and justifies the Exposition by a known truth, *Nam quod vice genitivi est apud Hebreos, saepe finem significat*: where you have a Learned discourse to the purpose I am now upon. And *Beza* also expounds it to the same purpose too, *Mendacii stabilienti causa edita*, Wonders wrought on purpose to confirm a lie.

3. Nor thirdly, will it any more help us to grant that some are lying wonders

wonders in the other sence, unless we could certainly tell which were so. Whether the wonder be real or no, it is all one to me, unless I be able to distinguish betwixt them. Suppose those of the *Egyptian* Sorcerers, or *Simon Magus*, or *Apollonius Tyaneus* (whom the Heathens set up to vye with Christ) I say suppose these were not real Miracles, but prestigious and delusive, yet how shall any man know, and make it appear they were so? they are as Convictive as true ones, unless they could be plainly discovered not to be so: and how to do this (from any thing in the things themselves) I profess my self wholly ignorant.

4. For fourthly, I shall receive little satisfaction by what is commonly said in this case, that's a true Miracle which can only be effected by a Divine power: for suppose that were granted true, yet how shall I know what can only be effected so, and what not? No man knows the limits of Satan's power, nor can say hitherto can he go, and no further, unless he can tell more than ever

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man yet did: nay perhaps no man can exactly tell the utmost reach of natural power; or define precisely how far natural causes when rightly applied, can work. And if he know not this, he knows little in order to satisfaction in this matter.

5. Nor truly is there much more relief in flying to the evident greatness of Miracles; though I gladly confess there is something in it; and it ought to be adored as a signal act of Divine Providence, that *Moses*, and especially *Christ* herein have the eminency above any other pretenders to Miracles in the world: (for *Moses* his Rod swallowed up the Magician's Rods, and *Apoltonius* could not heal all diseases, as *Christ* did, &c.

But still this is short of fully relieving us; for perhaps some things may seem greater Miracles to us, which are not so indeed. And subtil wits would say many things, to make it seem at least, that all Miracles are equally great.

And suppose it to be so, that many people might see some of these Miracles
only

only, and not the other: As suppose the *Samaritans* that saw the Miracles of *Simon Magus*, did not see those of Christ, or the Apostles, nor those that saw the wonders of *Apollonius*, to have heard of the other. I ask now what they should do in this case? If a Miracle be a good ground of truth, then they had that warrant to believe as grand falsehoods as ever were in the world.

But further yet, if you look into the Gospel, you shall find Christ telling his Apostles, *Mat. 24. 24.* that the false Christs that should arise after him, should shew, σημεῖα μεγάλα καὶ τέρατα, great signs and wonders; and so great, as to deceive the very Elect, were they not mightily assisted to avoid that deception.

6. From all which I collect that a bare Miracle is not enough to assure the truth, and warrant the belief of every Doctrine attested by it: for then the doctrine of *Apollonius* and *Simon Magus* had the same credibility as that of Christ.

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Christ. And if you look
Rev. 13. 14. into the Revelations of
S. John, you shall find
mention of a Beast which deceived men
by Miracles which he had power to
do: And in another * place
* Rev. 16. 14. we read of the Spirits of
Devils going forth to work
|| Cap. 19. 29. Miracles: and || again of
a false Prophet that
wrought Miracles. If Miracles there-
fore warrant Faith of every Doctrine,
then they do also warrant that of the
Devil and his Spirits, which God for-
bid.

7. Upon the strength of all which
Considerations, I say that Miracles
themselves need something to attest
them, and shew men when they are
to believe them, and when not to do
so; and I mistake much, if what hath
been said do not make this apparent.

8. And therefore lastly, to bring all
to a final issue, I do not know any
thing so certain a *revenue* of the di-
vinity of a Miracle, as the end and ef-
fects of it. If the doctrine that it is
wrought

wrought to attest, be plainly pure and holy, a mystery indeed of Godliness, and the effects that it produceth in men be answerable, *i. e.* the bringing them off from Idolatry and wickedness, to live religious and holy lives.

And upon these Two accounts especially, we shall find *Origen* and most of the first Apologists, proving the Divinity of our Saviours Miracles, and arguing the Miracles boasted by the Heathen, to be Hellish and Diabolical, because they were all done, *eis anárrhōn aduēsis*, as *Origen* speaks, to the deceivableness of unrighteousness, and to draw men into Idolatry, and all manner of filthiness.

And truly (for my own part) I do not know, upon what any man can safely rest in this matter, but upon this. The design and effect of Miracles is the best *Index* of them. Where a doctrine, upon due search, is truly divine and holy, and contrived to no other end, but to make all men so, and Miracles wrought by the promulgers of it, to attest the Divinity of their Doctrine and

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and Mission; there is doubtless all (the most unquestionable) evidence of truth, that even God himself is able to give.

So that the holiness of a Doctrine, proves the Divinity of the Miracle, as well as the Divinity of the Miracle attests the truth of the Doctrine.

And this is founded upon this most certain reason, that the Devil is a hater of goodness, and therefore will never effect any thing, to encourage or promote it amongst men: All his Interest lieth another way, and his kingdom is supported by sin and wickedness.

But God is a lover of holiness, it is his own very Life and Image; and as all his works of Providence are intended for the good of Souls, so all his works of wonder especially are designed to make men holy, and therefore shall never attest any doctrine but what conduceth to that great purpose.

I have now Sir, no more to add on this great subject, but only to show you, that I am not singular in this Notion: if you will please to be at the trouble

trouble of reading any the large discourses of the *Jewish* Rabbies on this subject, you shall find this to be the only solid thing to be safely relied upon, and indeed that upon which they are forced at last to rely chiefly upon.

But I shall mention to you two authorities, which I am apt to think, will signify as much with you as the whole Sanhedrim. The Learned *Grotius*, and the little less Learned Doctor *Stillingsfleet*; if you read the Notes of the first upon 2 *Thess.* 2. 9. you will find his opinion to be exactly consonant to what I have been proposing. And if you'll please to remember (what I know you have read) the Ninth and Tenth Chapters of the Dean's *Origines Sacrae*, (in the latter of which he saith as much to distinguish true Divine Miracles from false, as I think the matter can possibly bear) you will find, that though he lay down other marks, and certainly say as much upon them as rationally can be said, yet truly there's but little to fix contentedly and with satisfaction upon, in any other, but these

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these Two, *viz.* the nature and design of the Doctrine they do attest, and the effects they produce in the minds of men.

And now Sir, before I put a period to this Chapter, I shall (and I do not well know where better) add another Consideration, of some moment to strengthen our present Assertion: And that is from the consideration of the true notion of Heresie. For if the great Rule to judge this thing by, be holiness also, then I think it will be another good addition to our present Argument.

I consider then that as Heresie is marked in holy Scripture as a very great sin, and as severely characterized as any other sin whatsoever; so the chief reason why it is so, is because it is in some measure or other a recession from the holiness, and from that faith that is the foundation and support of it.

For therefore are Hereticks called men of corrupt minds, Reprobates concerning the faith, Enemies to God,
and

and Antichrists, all which characters do denote not their Error so much in matters of Faith, as in practice, and imply their secessions chiefly from the rules of holiness.

And the truth is, according to the sense of the best Antiquity, men do so far depart from the faith, as they do from holiness, and they are Hereticks not for that, but especially for this.

I do very well know how much men are alter'd now in their conceits about Heresie, from what they were of old: And the multiplying Articles of faith, and adopting Explications of them into the Creeds, is too clear an evidence of it, some men making these things advantages upon which to condemn for Heresie presently whatever in any thing differs from them.

But Sir, these things move me very little, unless it be to lament, and commiserate the uncharitableness of men in this matter.

He that would have a right notion of Heresie, must search what the Apostles, and Apostolick Ages called by

by that name, and not presently reproach as Heresie every thing that differs from him. And whoever will do so, will find that Heresie is Heresie, because it is a work of the flesh, *κατὰ τὴν δόξαν καὶ ἀβίμυλον διδασκαλίαν*, a wicked opinion, and an ungodly doctrine, an error in *materia practica*, in practice, not in opinion only, something that was amiss in *genere morum*.

For Faith is called by 1 Tim. 6. 3. S. Paul, *κατὰ εὐσέβειαν διδασκαλίαν*, a doctrine according to Godliness; and those that are Hereticks, are called unjust, unclean, uncharitable, perjured persons, and for that reason are said to oppose sound doctrine.

And that this only is the true notion of Heresie, may be made further to appear, from these Two primitive and Scriptural observations.

1. The considering those persons and doctrines that were branded with that ill character by the Apostles.

2. Their carriage towards the Jewish Converts in the great matter of Circumcisi-

cumcision, and the Law of Ceremonies.

1. Of the First, you will find in the Apostles times but a very few, nor in the Age immediately succeeding: Some tell us not above seven, and every one of them Hereticks for this reason, because they taught practical Impieties, or denied such Articles in the Creed, upon which the necessity of holiness was founded.

Simon Magus taught monstrous things of the Holy Ghost, and blasphemous things of himself. *Ebion* and *Cerintus* denied the Divinity of Christ, enjoined the observation of the *Mosaic* Law, and allowed uncleanness, and had impious Theorems about lust.

And the same is as true of *Menander* *Basilides*, *Carpocrates*, &c. whose opinions were therefore judg'd Heretical, not so much because they were real untruths, as because they were open defiances to all Faith, Sobriety and Sanctity.

2. If you consider the Apostles carriage towards the Jewish Converts, you

you will soon perceive how far they were from censuring any errors presently for Heresies, if they maintained the necessity of holiness and a good life.

For you will scarcely be able to instance in a doctrine more truly contrary to Christian Faith, and the whole purport of the Gospel, than that of those *Jewish* Converts was, which thought it absolutely necessary to Salvation to observe the Ancient Rites, and as *S. James* informs *S. Paul*, were all zealous of the Law of *Moses*.

And yet we know these were always tolerated, no ill characters fixed upon them, fellowship always allowed them, indulged and permitted to their error, which lasted among them for the time of fifteen Christian Bishops, who were all Circumcised, yea till the final destruction of the City and Temple, and all, under *Adrian*, the Emperor, and long afterwards.

And this was the reason we know of the Apostolick Canons in that first great

great Council, which were all contrived in favour to them, and counted necessary only in order to the avoiding scandal to them, as was also the observati-
on of the seventh day Sabbath for some Centuries of years, only for the same reason.

From whence we may safely collect thus much, that in those best and most charitable of times, no man was counted an Heretick that did erre *bonâ mente*, and retain'd a necessity of holiness, and a belief of the great grounds upon which that necessity was founded.

And now Sir, this Addition will not be impertinent to our purpose; for all Heretical doctrines are some way or other contrary unto holiness, and their being this is the reason of their being the other, and while they are not one, we ought by no means to call them the other, unless we will imitate the passion of those men, who can indure none (no not the least) dissenting in opinion from them in any thing, under any kinder character than Heresie. So that he that maintained the being of

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Antipodes was like to be branded once with that name, and *Galileo* hardly escaped the same character for maintaining the *Copernican hypothesis*.

But Sir, if you desire to see this matter of Heresie more fully discoursed, I refer you to a place in Dr. *Taylor's Works*, where it is insisted on at large, with that plainness and candor, and strength of reason that is so common and usual to that most excellent man; it is his *Liberty of Propheſying*, a good Book under an ill name. But truly I know not for what reason, unless it were for endeavouring by much truth, to assuage and mitigate the rash zeal, and unjust severity of the late times against the Church of *England*, and all that adhered unto her.

From whence whoever takes liberty to traduce that great man as an allower of all Opinions, and any Medley in Religion, will be very unjust, and proclaim himself either ignorant or unobservant of his design, which though it be to gain favour to some speculative Opinions, yet no man reflects more severely

severely upon all that contradict holiness and a good life, and are vented to the disorder and disturbance of the Government either of the Kingdom or Church.

And therefore I do not well see what disservice it can do that Church which is far enough from imperiously imposing upon the Consciences of men, and rigorous tying them up to exact compliance with it in all doctrines, but allows (as all Churches must whether they will or no) a liberty to mens thoughts, provided they reserve them to themselves, and vent them not in order to Schism and Faction.

But whether it be thus or not, is not my business to determine, much less becoming me to undertake to teach those above me what to say or think: but this I freely say, I have so great an honour for the name of Dr. Taylor, that I would not willingly have any ill thing to blot his memory, and would do more than this (were it in my power) to cause it might not.

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CHAPTER VI.

The Arguments from reason for the proof of the Collection: Four of these propounded; and Two insisted on in this Chapter: The first taken from the ends of these Two Spirits in the World: The second from the great design of Christian Religion.

AND now I am at liberty to advance to the Second way I proposed for the proof of this Assertion; and that is from Reason and Arguments; and there are Four of these I shall chuse to insist on; not that I think them the only ones we have in this matter, but so sufficient that they may supersede all need of others.

1. The first shall be taken from the consideration of the different ends and designs of these two Spirits in the World.

2. The second from the great end and design of Christian Religion.

3. The third from the inconvenience of substituting any other Rule besides this in this case.

4. From the manifest advantage of this above any other, that can be so substituted.

These Four things will give assurance enough to this truth, and make it very evident.

1. I begin with the first, which is taken from the consideration of the designs that these two Spirits have in the World: The strength of which argument to our present purpose will discover it self in these two or three consequential notices.

1. First, As these are directly contrary to each other, so they must needs be supposed to intend, and drive on different aims and designs in the World. The Spirit of truth is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of error is the Spirit of the Devil: And when light and darkness are reconciled each to other, when Christ and *Belial* become friends, then

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may we suppose these Two Spirits to consent, and agree together in the same designs, but not before. There is no communion (saith *2 Cor. 6. 14.* the Apostle) *τις κοινωνία*, nothing that's in common, nothing that's mutually shared betwixt light and darkness: But as soon as one appears, the other presently flies away, as when the rayes of the morning discover themselves, the dark shades run away, and hide themselves on the other side of this Globe: And so it is with these two Spirits, they are inconsistently opposite, and contrary each to other, and can never be any more reconciled in their designs, than they are in their natures: But those will still be as different as these are, as we see it still to be in all other things, whose natures are contrary each to other.

2. Secondly, all the doctrines that issue from, or are suggested to men by these two Spirits, must needs be supposed to be directed to these different ends, and designed on purpose to promote the same. To suppose otherwise, were

were to imagine them false to their own Interests, and neglectful of them, or at least dull and short-sighted, and unable to chuse or pitch upon proper means for the promoting of the same; when no man hath any reason to imagine either of these things: For the Spirit of God is both Omniscient and Active, and can never fail either to know what doctrines will best comport with its great design among men, or to pursue, and reveal those doctrines to men, when it hath pitched on them. And he that will consider how very subtil a Spirit the Devil is, and how unweariedly restless in managing his own designs in the world, can neither think him ignorant and unable to pitch upon such doctrines as are conducive to that design, nor slow and backward to obtrude the belief of them upon men.

He that thinks otherwise of the Spirit of truth, thinks very unbecomingly of God, and, as much as in him lies, precludes the way to his own welfare and safety, and deprives himself of that comfort, which would issue from the

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heartly belief of the Omniscience, and Providence, and Watchfulness of the Spirit of truth for his good. And he that thinks otherwise of the Spirit of Error, and looks upon the Devil either as a dull and unactive, or a silly and ignorant Spirit, is imprudent and injurious to himself, in undervaluing that Enemy, against whose subtilty and strength, his utmost endeavours will be little enough. He is called a Lion for his strength, and an old Serpent for his subtilty, and his restlessness to execute the effects of both, render him justly formidable.

3. Thirdly, the great ends of these two Spirits in the world are only these, to make men really and truly holy, and to make them really impure and vicious. The first is the great design of the Spirit of Truth, this latter of the Spirit of Error. The first the Spirit of Truth intends, as the only way to make men happy. The second the Devil mainly intends as the sure way to render them Eternally miserable.

There

There needs not much be said on this branch of our Argument, the Scriptures are copious in attesting the truth of it on both hands. The great work of the Spirit in the O. T. was to strive with man, as is intimated by *Moses*, Gen. 6. 3. i. e. to withdraw him from sin, and to induce him to the love and practice of vertue. And the same is the end he is sent for in the New, to convince men of the evil of sin, of the gain of righteousness, and (as a means to both) to assure them of the certainty of *John 16. 18.*

Judgment: and for this reason is called the Spirit of holiness often, not only because he is essentially and eminently so himself, but likewise because his main business is to teach and encourage men to be so too, and to assist them in being faithful to those encouragements and teachings.

And then on the other hand, as it assures us that the first sin of man owed it self to the temptation and suggestion of the Devil, so it assures us that all his endeavour ever since hath been to heighten

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heighten that sin, and to promote the love and practice of wickedness among men. For this reason he is frequently called the *over-seer*, the wicked one, not only upon the account of his own wickedness, but for his striving perpetually to propagate that wickedness, by drawing men into all the sad instances of it: And for the same reason he is called The Enemy, and the effects of his Enmity chiefly discover themselves in this, the endeavouring to make men wicked like himself, and so to bring on them a portion of those torments that are reserved for himself, and for all those mad Sons of men that are wicked as he is.

And whosoever observes his actings as they are recorded in the Scripture, or will but consult the stories of his dealing with the Heathen world, examine but the doctrines which he taught them, and the rites and modes of Religion that he instituted among them, will clearly see how all those doctrines tended to sin, and how the whole body of the Heathen worship, was indeed what

what the Apostle calls it, a mystery of wickedness,

Now from these things the strength of the argument will discover it self. For since all the design of the Spirit of truth is to make men holy, to guide them into all truth, that it may thereby lead them to all goodness: And since the Spirit of error designs directly the contrary: And since all the doctrines that issue from these, are directed only to these great ends: It must needs follow, that whatever doctrine tends to holiness must needs issue from the Spirit of Truth: And whatever tends to the contrary, must needs proceed from the Spirit of Error. And that this is a sure and safe way to judge whence they proceed by. For these two Spirits will ever be true to their own purposes and interests, and will always have an eye to the promoting of them, in all the doctrines that they propose to the Faith of men.

2. Another Argument may be drawn from the great end and design of Christian Religion. For if we suppose

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pose the author thereof prudent and wise, every doctrine therein will be so contrived, as to comport with, and promote the great aim of the whole; otherwise he would in effect pull down with one hand, what he endeavoured to build with the other.

Now he that will consider and examine this Religion with that seriousness and impartiality that things of this nature may justly expect, and challenge from all men, will soon find that it is indeed what *S. Paul* *1 Tim. 3. 16.* calls *μυστήριον θεότητος*, a *mystery of godliness*.

The Author of it, the ever blessed *Jesus*, was indeed the Lamb of God, for his spotless innocency, as well as other reasons.

A perfect pattern of all holiness and virtue. A divine person whose life was never sullied with the least of those crimes, which so horribly stained the lives of the Heathen Deities. Whose innocency approved it self so clearly to his very Judge, as to extort from him this confession, that he was a
just

just person. Yea that most Envious and Critical observer, as well as Virulent accuser of good men, could find nothing whereof to accuse the blessed Jesus: *The Prince of this world cometh and findeth nothing in me.* Mat. 27. 24.

And if you look into the Religion that he instituted in the world, you will soon find how exactly it resembles and bears the lineaments of its holy Author, in all the parts of it. All its precepts and commands are so many injunctions of all the instances of holiness, or prohibitions of the contrary instances of wickedness and vice. All its promises are great encouragements to induce men to comply with the purpose of those commands: And its threatnings are added only to deter and affright them from all neglect and contempt of the same.

And should we survey the Articles of its Faith, and the doctrines that it proposeth to the belief of men, we should soon find how mighty wisely they are all contrived to promote the same

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same great end. Even those that seem mostly speculative and irrelative to duty, yet upon a closer view, will be found to be excellently conducive to it.

For this is one honour justly due to Christian Religion, that it doth not propose any useless Theorems, nor any dry and unprofitable Speculations to its votaries, but only require of them the faith and knowledge of things which are mighty useful, and greatly conducive to the real advantages of life and godliness. And this Sir, may perhaps be made appear hereafter in a distinct consideration of all those Articles of Faith, and particulars of Christian doctrine, that have been mostly excepted against in this matter.

At present I content my self only in generals, and to add that this Truth is so very plain, and so fully illustrated, and substantially proved by many Learned men, not only those Ancient Heroes, and worthy Apologists for Christianity, but even some later writers, and good men of our own Communion;

munion, that I think it needless to insist further upon it, but only to intimate, that you may boldly defie any objections against it, and challenge the whole world either to instance in any one particular of it, that tolerates or encourageth any manner of vice, or to produce any other way of Religion, that so strictly and universally enjoyns and promotes holiness.

And if this be so, we may very safely from hence also draw an Argument, for the proof of our present Assertion: For if the Christian Religion be designed only to this great end, then whatever doctrine is truly and genuinely Christian doth certainly comply with it, and some way or other promote the same. And whatever doctrine fails to do this, and is in any degree or instance repugnant hereunto, is certainly Antichristian; and we have warrant enough to reject it, as dictated by that Spirit of Error, which is certainly contrary to the Spirit of Christianity and Truth.

For

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For (as I said before) supposing the blessed Author of this Religion to be wise and prudent as God, and to have intended hereby only to make men holy, it cannot reasonably be supposed, that any doctrine which he hath delivered therein, should not be conducive to that great design; for otherwise he would frustrate that by some doctrines, which he did endeavour to promote by others; which were a thing so very unbecoming a wise man, that it would be blasphemy to affirm it of the Son of God.

CHAPTER VII.

The third and fourth Arguments proposed.

The Inconvenience of substituting any other rule but this, and the manifest advantage of this above any other that can be substituted.

THE last Chapter hath acquainted us with two Arguments, upon the strength of which, I think, we may
safely

safely conclude, that this is one sure and certain rule to judge doctrines that pretend to be Christian by. I shall now proceed to two other Arguments, whose design it is to make this rule appear the best and safest to judge by.

3. And the form of them is taken from the manifest inconvenience of substituting any other rule to judge by in this case. I shall name those that are most plausibly contended for, and shew you the inconveniences that all of them are subject unto.

1. I begin with that which is the best and likeliest of all, the holy Scriptures: And I do not intend by any thing I shall say in this discourse; to derogate in the least either from the authority or perfection of them. And I readily and thankfully grant these two things, which will sufficiently secure me from such an imputation.

First, if men were honest and sincere as they should be, this rule would sufficiently supersede all need of any other, because it is a perfect revelation of God's will, in which all things that

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are absolutely needful, to be believed, are fully contained, and intelligibly delivered and expressed; and nothing but perverseness and design can perplex them.

Secondly, if men desire to know what holiness and vertue is, and to be directed in the instances of their duty: then the holy Scripture will fully satisfy them. And if men honestly consult these, none but the obstinate, and such as design to cheat themselves, can mistake their directions.

But still after all this, I say we are so unhappy as to see that holy Scripture doth not put an end to all controversies: We live in a Church that allows us these in the fairest translations, and plainest expositions, and not only allows but enjoyns us the perusal of them; and thinks it hath Divine war-

rant to recommend to men
John 5. 39. the searching of the Scrip-
 tures. And therefore com-
 mits men to their plain duty, against
 which it will permit no prudential Mo-
 tives (as they of Rome call them) to in-
 terpose.

terpose. And yet even amongst us, there are many sharp and eager contentions and disputes, to which Scripture perhaps (if men were honest) would, but we see it doth not put an issue, and it may be never can for these two Reasons. Because all parties plead it, and pretend to it; yea that very Novel Sect among us, that at first so greatly disparaged and contended against it. It is notoriously known what men had a hand in forming this Sect, and indeed there are many clear signatures upon the *factus*, to enable us to judge who was the Parent, and amongst the rest this is one, and the design and policy in it plain, which was to disparage the holy Scriptures, and bring them into disesteem and contempt (as they have always done) and then the process was very easie, for the private Spirit they could easily when they pleased take them off, by shewing it liable to a thousand inconveniences, and when the Scripture was undervalued too, then the Catholick Church, and him

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that they pretended to be the Infallible Head of it, was the next refuge.

But these men soon saw that such things would not long take in *England*, where all men generally have a great veneration for the Scriptures, and whom it is not easie to debauch into a total disesteem of them: and therefore now the scene is changed, and these men are permitted to pretend to Scripture as strongly as others, and all imaginable art used, that they may do it as plausibly.

And indeed it may too truly be said, that this hath been the common refuge of almost all Hereticks, who by pleading and perverting of it, have endeavoured to gain reputation to their several Heresies.

2. For secondly, cunning men can make a shift to wrest and pervert it: The truth is, the Originals in which it was written, are so very copious, that they are capable easily of various and different Interpretations. Sometimes a small point, and a Comma makes a difference even to contrary Expositi-

Expositions. It was so of old among the Jews, and it was so long since among Christians (as *S. Peter* tells us) and we our selves sadly see it to be so to this day.

Now in these cases I ask what men shall do? Two men equally pretend Scripture; and Two men give different Expositions of the same Scripture; in this case what were a private Christian best to do? I know well enough what remedy the Learned might have: But it is ten to one a private Christian cannot make use of the same, because he doth not understand the Original Languages, much less the Criticisms of them, and the customs of the places and people related to: Nor perhaps is so mighty well versed in Scripture, as by comparing one place with another, to be able to collect the true sense of all.

In this case it is easie to see the inconvenience of substituting this Rule only to judge by, because it self is perplexed, and equally pleaded by both,

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and every common Christian cannot tell which of the Two it favoureth most.

2. Another thing pretended as a sure Rule to judge by in this case, is a single person; for whom we know what kind of men plead mightily, and contend highly that God hath vested him with Infallibility, and designed him to be that lively Oracle to which the Church in all its doubts ought to resort, and with whose determinations all men should rest satisfied, and be concluded: And I must needs say, were there any such person, there were a short and easie way of silencing all disputes in the world.

But against this I offer only these two considerations.

1. First, That every man must be sure of this Infallibility, or else he can never with any steadiness remit all his doubts to his Infallibility. But we not only see that a great many of men plainly deny it, and almost all mightily doubt of it: But

2. Second-

2. Secondly, are mightily satisfied, that no man ever can be sure of it, not only because God himself hath not declared a syllable of any such thing, which he certainly would have done, had it been true, it being a thing of such infinite moment, and so mightily concerning the world to know: But also because it is evident, that such persons have mightily erred, and nothing is more familiar than for one Pope to contradict the determinations, and repeal the Sanctions of another. And also because they that most eagerly contend for this, do not know how to tell us, when we are to judge him Infal-
lible, and when not.

And indeed the effects of this pre-
tence have been so monstrously pernicious, as to prejudice sufficiently all sober men against it, who consider that this very thing hath had a mighty hand in debauching Christian Religion to those horrid degrees, which we sadly see at this day.

3. General Councils: And I confess I am one of those who have a mighty

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reuerence for what just and lawful Councils shall determine, and I think it would be of great advantage to the peace of the Church, if all men had so too.

But then I do not see why these should be appealed to as the only Rule or Judges in these things: Not only because they cannot be pretended to be Infallible, for they are men, and may erre, and they actually have done so: But also, should we allow them a kind of Infallibility (for absolute they cannot pretend to) yet it will not be easie for every single person to know what they have determined; and upon every difference that arose, new Councils must be Convened, which is a thing next to impossible.

4. An immediate Spirit, which though some men so mainly contend for in this Age, and many have done formerly, there having been few or no Ages of the Church in which there have not been Enthusiasts, and pretenders to Divine Impulses and Revelations: yet there are these two eternal exceptions against it.

1. That

1. That nothing more exposeth men to the delusions of that crafty Spirit of error than this doth: And it is most certain, that pretences to, expectations of, and reliances on it, have been one of the chief causes of many ancient Heresies, and of those woful differences that are at present among us: And the wildest errors that have infested the Church have been fathered upon it.

2. Secondly, That this also is to be tried by something else, as *S. John* enjoyns, *Versē 1.* of this Chapter, telling us, that many false Spirits are gone out into the world, and therefore making it necessary for all that would not be deluded by them, to make carefully a trial of them. And if the Spirit it self be to be tried, it is not a Rule to try all things by.

5. Antiquity: And there is no doubt, but the streams are always purest, that are nearest to the fountain: and Christianity flourished in its purity and truth for some Centuries at the first. And if men would search Antiquity,

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quity, and let the Primitive times determine for them, there would not be so many contests as there are in the Christian Church.

But there is this unhappy and invincible exception against it, that it is mighty difficult, and next to impossible, to know what Antiquity believed and practised in many cases. We have but very little left us of the three first Centuries: And the greatest Scholars, and they that have travelled farthest in the search of Antiquity, are at a mighty loss, as to the knowledge of them: and therefore how every private Christian should be able, upon all occasions to have recourse to it, and still have it in readiness to judge all things by, is very hard to determine.

6. *Catholick Tradition*; for which some men contend both eagerly and sharply, and have racked ingenuity to say all that can be said for it, and for what reasons we know. And I do most readily acknowledge that a great deference ought to be had to it, and a greater than generally is: But still af-

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ter all that can be said, there are these two exceptions against it.

First, That men cannot tell us what is a Catholick Tradition, and what is not so: at least they can instance but in very few things that have unexceptionably been owned for such: since few things have ever been pretended such, about which there have not been great disputes and sharp contentions.

Secondly, Tradition is so very liable to corruption, and so very many plain instances can be given of its degeneracy: Besides all which, the same inconvenience still presseth here too, for how all private Christians should be able to guide themselves by this, cannot easily be shewed.

7. The authority of that Church of which a man is a present member. And there is no doubt, but every man owes a great respect to this, and should not but in mighty plain and great instances ever think contrary to it: and there is as little doubt but it would be mighty advantagious, and of great use and benefit, for men to be ready to be concluded

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concluded by the determinations and Symbols and Canons of it, and I little question but a private Christian erring with this, shall have a great deal to plead for himself, and shall have great abatements made for his Error at the last day. But yet there are some exceptions against this being made an only Rule to judge by, and amongst others these two.

1. That a man doth not know his own Church to be Infallible, for there is not any such promise made to any particular Church upon Earth: And though a man may be mighty ready to be concluded by it, and in most doubts suffer that scale in which the Churches judgment lies to preponderate, and to over-rule all his lesser scruples, yet till he be assured of its infallibility he cannot absolutely commit his faith to the conduct of it, nor unquestionably permit it in every thing to determine for him.

2. That then there might safely be as many different Creeds, as there are differing Churches upon the Earth;
and

and then there need not be so much disputing about a true Church, nor hunting after marks of it; since the faith of every man's own Church would certainly save him, which I take to be a doctrine too bold for any man to believe, that exerciseth his reason to any measures at all.

I cannot easily remember any thing besides these, that can be substituted as a Rule in this matter, but if I could, I do not at all doubt, but that it would appear liable to as many or more difficulties than any of these: And I cannot but think these great inconveniences that all and every one of these fore-named are incumbred withal, are a sufficient reason upon which to reject them from being Rules in this case; especially

4. If we compare this that I am contending for, and consider the evident advantages that it hath above them, and the less difficulties that it is pressed withal. I have partly hinted before that there are these two things greatly needful in such a Rule, facility, and safety;

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safety ; that it be both easie and safe to judge by : and I think it a fair offer, the Rule that bids fairest in these two, let it be accepted. I shall therefore a while consider it more absolutely in it self, in point both of easiness and safety : and secondly, compare it a little with these that have been named, and intimate something of the advantage and preference that it claims before them.

1. It is a Rule that is truly capable of both these characters : For first, it is easie to judge by ; for few men but of common either knowledge or honesty, can mistake in judging what is holy and what is not : seeing the knowledge of these things is in a great measure imprinted on our very natures, and grows up with us.

We need not go and consult Oracles, nor say who shall ascend into Heaven to fetch us a resolution from thence ; for as *Moses* Deut. 30. 14. and *S. Paul* both say the Word is nigh us, even in our own hearts, there the great lines of duty

duty are written legibly and plainly, and an honest (though meanly instructed) mind will quickly attain the knowledge of them.

So that a Heathen might, and some actually have judged pretty rightly in this instance: For as these give evidence of a Law written in their hearts, as the Apostle Rom. i. 19. tells us they do, so many of them that have attended closely to this con-^{com}mate light, have by it alone attained almost to an exact knowledge in these things, and passed a right sentence upon all Opinions and Doctrines that did not consent with the same.

But supposing a man in the profession of Christianity, and under the advantage of the written Law and Revelations of God; we let him in infinitely greater advantages, forasmuch as all things of necessary duty are so clearly revealed and made known therein, that it is not very ealie to be ignorant of, or not to understand them.

And secondly, it is as safe to judge by it as it is ealie to do so: For first, if

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a judgment be truly made by it, it is infallibly certain; and any doctrine that truly tends to the promoting holiness, is as undoubtedly Christian and Divine, and true, as if God had written it with his own hand: And every doctrine that truly promotes and encourageth the practice of vice, is as certainly false and diabolical, as if we saw it proceed out of the mouth of the old Dragon. And secondly, if a man should chance to erre, while he really and truly judgeth for this, I think it may safely be said that error is not damnable: It is an error on the safer side, a mistake on the better hand: A judging for God and his interest, where the will is honest and innocent and good, and where that is so, I do not know how to call any thing a sin.

This I take to be certain, an honest heart using its sincere and true endeavour, and intending really to embrace and follow that, which best teacheth its duty, and engageth to it, is certainly safe. God's good Providence and Grace will superintend and assist such a man,

man, that he shall either not fall into any error at all, or at least not into any damnable one : God's Spirit will lead him into all truth, that is really needful for him to know.

2. Should we now make a comparison between this and the others, upon these two things, we should presently see to which the advantage would incline. Some of them are not safe to judge by, and some not easie to do so, and some again neither of the two, as would easily be made appear, should we again review, and distinctly consider them ; which because I have not leisure, or a mind to do my self, I shall beg and trust you or any other to do for me. I am sure he will find all those clogged with some inconveniences, from which this is either wholly, or in a great measure free ; which I take to be a good reason, upon which to give it the preference above them.

Not but that I can easily foresee that this Rule also may be pressed with some difficulties, and could we lay down a Rule which were not, we should then

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anticipate our future state, and contrive a way to secure man from all possibility of error, which in this imperfect state is a thing rather to be wished than hoped for : We must therefore in this make as good a shift as we can, and chuse that as the safest, which least subjects us unto error, or at least to the fewest : which because this doth, I therefore propose it as the best thing to be attended to in this case : And only further add, that whatever mistakes we may be subject to in judging by this, we may in a great measure secure our selves from, by attending to those directions for the management of this judgment, that the next Chapter will make known to us.

C H A P. VIII.

Six rules laid down to be observed by us in our judging by this rule, and three of these insisted upon.

TH E judging of all doctrines being somewhat a difficult thing, and no Rule to judge by being so mighty plain, but that men may be incident unto error in their applications of it (as the former Chapter intimated) it will be needful to contrive against that error as well as we can, and to preserve from all misapplying this Rule as much as may be: In order to which there are these six things which I shall prescribe to be observed carefully by us in this matter.

1. That in our judging by this Rule, we consider the doctrines only, and not the men that profess and maintain them.

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2. That we consider doctrines not only in themselves, and specious appearance, but in their natural and direct consequences.

3. That we be sincere and unprejudiced in considering, and do not allow our selves to pervert or wrest them.

4. That doctrines, or modes of Religion be not considered only in some single instances, but complexly and fully.

5. That men have a right notion of holiness, and consider duly both in what things it doth consist, and all those things too.

6. That holiness be considered not only in its immediate exercise, but together with all the helps, advantages and encouragements to it.

These are Rules enough to be observed by us in this matter, and I cannot easily foresee any great inconveniences that we shall be pressed with, or incident unto, if we keep us close, and attend carefully to them.

1. The first is, that in our judging of things by this Rule, we consider only

ly the doctrines themselves, and not the men that make profession of them; for otherwise we shall be greatly intangled, and perplexed in our thoughts, and in great danger of pronouncing wrong judgment, we may acquit the guilty, and condemn the innocent, we may be ensnared to embrace the worst, and to cast off the best and truest doctrines.

There are few things more common, than to see Hereticks and venters of strange and pernicious Doctrines, to behave themselves with the greatest seeming strictness and caution of any men. Our Saviour therefore represents them as wearing sheeps cloathing, the shew *Matth. 7. 15.* of a mighty innocence, and putting on the disguise of all possible sanctity: And *S. Paul* informs us of much-what the same thing, when he lays down among their other characters this of having a form of Godliness. *2 Tim. 3. 5.*

And the truth is, they were very imprudent and silly, if they should ap-

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pear otherwise, this is the surest way they can possibly take, to gain esteem to themselves, and reputation to the doctrines they would profelyte men into a belief of: well knowing that error in its native dress and true colours would never be entertain'd by men, and therefore it is carefully apparell'd in a false and specious garb, by which it steals mens affections, and cheats them into a love and esteem of it. And as designing men cloath their doctrines, so commonly they do themselves; for the first great business of a Seducer is to gain a reputation of being holy and good, which when it is once gotten, will easily insinuate and make way for his doctrine; for men easily believe and follow such men, and do not fear Imposture from those that they esteem holy and good.

And on the other hand, it is often (too often God knows) seen, that men detain the truth in unrighteousness, believe well and Orthodoxly, and yet are false to their own faith, and treacherous to their avowed principles, and
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never live consonantly to either. And by this means greatly reproach and scandalize their own most holy profession, as the impure *Gnosticks* did Christianity at the first: And if the faith of such men were to be measured by their lives, and the effects it hath on them, they were doubtless the greatest Hereticks in all the world.

This is a suggestion which as it reflects a great deal of reproach and shame upon such men, so it bespeaks the great heed and care of others, that they be not hasty presently to judge mens Religion only by their actions: For many men wear paints and disguise to conceal a rotten faith; and too many are careless and foolish, and unmindful of adorning a true one.

It were easie to cite the best Antiquity to vouch the reasonableness and prudence of practising this Rule. For therefore the primitive Fathers of the Church, when the seeming Sanctity of Heathens and Hereticks was objected to them, did strongly endeavour to expose their doctrines, and to shew that

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such things were not really the effects of them, but *fucus*'s and paints on purpose to give reputation to them. And when on the other hand, they were pressed with the profane lives of some of their own way, they presently appealed to the principles of their Religion, and thoroughly vindicated them, from any way influencing, or inclining men to such evil things: And having done so, proceeded to disclaim these men as false Brethren, and no true Catholicks, and therefore pleaded it an unjust thing to argue against Christians from the impure lives of some that professed, but begged it as a reasonable thing, that they would allow them the same favour, which they themselves challenged in the like case, *viz.* that the failings of some pretended Christians might no more be objected against the divinity and truth of that Religion, than the vices of some Philosophers were thought meet, to disparage the credit and truth of all Philosophy.

2. The second Rule is, that we consider doctrines not only in themselves,
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and specious appearances, but in those consequences that naturally and directly issue from them : For it is not more true of men, than of doctrines sometimes, that they put on a very specious and fair outside, and in their present appearance seem mighty innocent, which yet if a man closely inspect, and search into, he will soon find to be very poisonous and destructive in the consequences of them. This is always in some measure true of all Errors and Heresies that are, one way or other they are pernicious in their intentions, and if they be pursued to their just consequences, certainly destructive.

Let me give you one *specimen* of this instead of many, I would fain know what seems more innocent, and of better effect, than that all men should attend to that measure of light, that is in their own breasts ? Harken carefully to that *Δαίμων ἐνὶ στήθεσσι*, (as some Ancients called a mans Conscience) that good *Genius* in a man's own Bosom : And doubtless it were good men did

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did this, and if they did so, they would act much better than many do.

But yet who sees not the danger that lurks under this fair pretence, and what horrid consequences flow from it, when driven to its true purpose? How it wholly evacuates the satisfaction of Christ, and all necessity of a Saviour: Decries all need of Divine assistance and Grace: Renders wholly useless the Divine Inspirations: Makes every man his own infallible Oracle and Teacher: Exposeth a man to the deceptions of that subtil and watchful Spirit; and finally opens a way for every man to do that which is right in his own eyes.

It were as easie to instance in some other doctrines of this mad Sect, and all others among us at this day, and shew how even the most innocent of them (I mean in which they differ from the Church) to be deadly and mighty mischievous when pursued and driven home to their proper consequences: and perhaps Sir, that may be done, if you require it, hereafter.

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In the mean time, this will render it mighty necessary and wise, not to consider erroneous doctrines only in their fair appearances, but to examine carefully what the consequences and effects of them are.

And so on the other side likewise, there are many doctrines in the Christian Religion Orthodox and Divine, that perhaps at first sight may appear very irrelative to practice, or at least of no great moment to the purposes of life: Yea, which to some men may appear unreasonable, and purely speculative, which yet when a man hath examined closely, and consider well of, may be found very important, and greatly concerning, and very conducive to many real purposes of goodness. And it will not be easie to instance in any, which I cannot shew to be conducive to some great instances of holiness, and whose truth and divinity I dare not undertake to make good by the same.

3. The third Rule is, that we be sincere and honest in our considering doctrines, before we bring them to this

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this standard. I mean that we bring with us no other design in the world, but really to know what such doctrines are, and tend unto: For if any other thing be had in aim, any other design or prejudice be permitted to mingle with our searches into these things, there is no doubt but we shall deflect and warp from the truth in judgment. A very little skill if there be not a great deal of honesty, will enable a man to expose any doctrine, and those men that can so easily wrest the holy Scriptures, doubtless can as easily pervert any doctrine though never so holy.

Facile est invenire baculum, said the old adage, and it holds true both ways; he that comes either with a prejudice against, or a prepossession for any doctrine, will easily find faults against the one, though never so rationally, and something to justify his kindness to the other, though never so weakly asserted: And when men will permit interest or passion, or humour or prejudice, or any such thing to sit upon the Tribunal, and have a hand
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in judging doctrines, it is not to be expected that they should be judged according to the real merits and truth of them.

A gift, saith Solomon, blindeth the eye, or destroyeth the heart, and a receiver of them is seldom upright. And it is equally true of any other by-respect or sinister inclination. Nothing but a fixed resolution and purpose to be honest and just, and truly to inform our selves, can enable us to be true to our discoveries, and pronounce aright concerning doctrines in this case. Eccles. 7. 7.

It was no very unreasonable project in the *Platonists* of old, to institute some previous purgations of mind, to be submitted unto by those that were in quest of truth, well knowing that till the mind of man was unprejudiced and free, it was not capable of Divine irradiations, nor in a capacity to understand truth. And upon the same reason *Aristotle* prohibited young men the study of Moral Philosophy, till they had in some competent measure subdued

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ed the vigour, and tamed the hurry of their animal passions, and sensual inclinations. And it were very well if men would do something like this, free themselves from all manner of partial anticipations, when they are going to consider and judge for their Souls.

And let me add Sir, there was never any age wherein the observation of this Rule was more necessary, never a time certainly wherein the effects of partiality and prejudice more discovered themselves, to the warping of mens judgments, and clapping false biasses upon them, so that they either cannot, or will not impartially and truly weigh things, or deal with any degree of candor by them: wherein unjustly to pervert and misrepresent Books, is to answer them, and the fastening on them a design which the Author never thought of, a sufficient confutation of them: When men read Books on purpose to misunderstand and traduce them, and think the most effectual way to baffle and defeat them, is to buffoon and turn them into *Ridicule*.

Let

Let me give you a few *specimens* of this, though I doubt not you have already observed them your self.

Can you think we should ever have heard of a *Rehearsal Transposed*, or an Ill Play thought a good answer to a serious Book, had not this perverse humour possessed some men that were proud of their great wits, and too fanciful to be able truly to consider things?

Could any honest-hearted man, that sincerely read over an excellent Book, called *The Design of Christianity*, ever have traduced it as a plain undermining the purpose of the Gospel?

Had we ever heard of an *Antisozzo*, or a *Melius Inquirendum*, if that Author had had as much honesty as he thinks he hath wit? or considered the doctrines in those Books (he would expose) with half as much integrity, as he hath taken pains unworthily to misrepresent them?

Can you imagine Satan would ever have been brought upon the stage complementing *Sherlock*, if the Devil had not mightily assisted one *Danson*, to misun-

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misunderstand and pervert the design of that Book?

Could that perfidious doating Exil'd *Frenchman* have ever espied and reported such advances of the Church of *England* to Popery, had not himself made greater advances first towards Frenzy or Knavery?

Or the late furious Collector of the *Invidious Parallels* made such a clamor with them, and seek so basely to disturb the Ashes, and deface the Monuments of those that rest in honour, but that something made a noise in his own head, and hindred him from hearing or attending to the checks of his own Conscience for such a piece of injustice?

I pray God Sir, deliver you and me, and bless us from falling into the hands of such men, who read Books on purpose to misunderstand them, and consider doctrines only to expose them: who react the cruelty and injustice of Ancient Persecutors, that cloathed the poor Christians in skins of Beasts, and then glutted their malice and envy in
worrying

worrying of them: And deal with Books as *Procrustes* did with men, rack them till they come up to their own humour, or cut them in pieces for not doing so: Who first tincture their own eye, and then apprehend every thing to be of the same colour; or having their own palates vitiated, reproach as unfavoury and bitter every thing that comports not with the ill affections of it.

If it be my hard fate to fall into the hands of such men, and be treated by them as some of my Brethren have been, I will yet have this to comfort and support me, that it is not truth or honesty, but spleen and malice only that persecute me. I should be concerned indeed, should I offend the first; but if men acted by the other speak evil of me, I know who hath bade me rejoyce and be glad.

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CHAP. IX.

The Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Rules are mentioned and insisted on.

4. **T**HE fourth Rule is, that doctrines and Modes of Religion formed by them, be not considered only in some single instances, but complexly and fully in all together. I mean, that we take not only some few particular doctrines of a Sect or Mode of Religion, and singly consider them, and pass a judgment upon all only by them: But that we take a view of all its parts, and examine every instance of it thoroughly, especially all those in which it differs from others.

For as there is very rarely or never any Error without some mixture of Truth, the more to set it off, and give it

it credit : No more is there any Sect, any way of Religion who doth not acknowledge and teach some excellent Truths, and own some very wholsom doctrines : And it will therefore concern every man that would not be intrapped by them, not only to consider some few, but the whole mass of their doctrines and belief.

Some things we may light of in the Symbols of all parties that may be innocent, and true, and good, but others, in many, that are as really diabolical and untrue : And he that will be induced by those good things, to pass a judgment upon all, is imprudent and unwise, and may easily be induced to absolve the most pernicious doctrines that were ever vented by any Heretick in the world. The old Maxim is pertinent to be considered here, and it holds true in this instance as strongly as in any others, to render a thing truly good there must be a concurrence of all causes, when a failure in one is enough to render a thing evil.

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And therefore though a Sect do stedfastly maintain, and earnestly contend for twenty great Truths, yet if it take into its Symbols of belief, one gross Error, that plainly contradicts the design of Religion, and establisheth disobedience and vice in any one instance, it is a sufficient warrant for us to reject it upon : and we ought not in that case to plead the many truths it maintains, for in them it Symbolizeth with the Church, and holds them in common with it : But upon the other it separateth, and makes the Schism, and takes its denomination from, and therefore by those especially is to be acquitted or condemned.

5. The fifth Rule is, that we be careful still that we have a right notion of holiness, according to which we are to judge, for if we mistake here, and do not understand rightly our own Rule, we shall certainly erre in our judging by it. There are two things that I intend in this suggestion. 1. That we do truly understand in what things holi-

holiness and real goodness doth consist. 2. That we consider all those things.

1. That we do really understand in what things holiness and the practice of goodness doth consist: For I observe that many are very apt to mistake here, and to place holiness in the practice of things, which signifie little or nothing to the real purposes of it.

It hath been an Error as ancient as the *Pharisees* time, to Tithe Mint, and Annise, and Cummin, and yet neglect the weightier things of the Law; as Justice, Mercy, and Faithfulness: And the Error hath been transcribed in all Ages since: For so some men have been mighty exact in the Ceremonial parts of Religion, and yet greatly neglective of the real: And others have chosen to themselves some little easie things, and laid great weight upon them, while the more substantial and arduous duties have been disregarded by them: Substituted some cheap trifling performances, in the place of real

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obedience to Gods commands : Placed Religion in a habit, or a dress, or a demure look, or a distinct form of speech, or some little *Shibboleth* or other, and by exactness in these presently conclude themselves reformed, and separated from the pollutions of other men.

I do not go to enquire into the reasons of men's doing thus, they are already too plain, men can in these gratifie their Lusts, and their Consciences too, indulge their pride, and interest, and ease, and yet in some measure pacifie their own minds, for they do not wholly neglect Religion, only commute the great duties of it into some cheaper performances, by which as they make a shift to gull their own Consciences, so they may get a reputation among men, before whom these things make a great and glaring show, and a mighty noise, when faithfulness, and mercy, and truth, and humility, and the other great instances of real goodness are more secret and unobserved,
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and boast not themselves so before men.

TO This therefore is a Rule that's mighty necessary to be attended unto, especially in this Age, in which *Pharisaism* is so much revived, and men's Religion dwindled into appearances, and outside, and fair shews, and mere pageantry. So that if we judge presently here by outward appearance, we shall go near to judge unrighteous judgment: But if we consider that holiness doth not consist in these things, we shall go near to preserve our selves from any over-valuing of them.

For in such a case the truth rather inclines the other way, and whenever we see men mighty exact and critical in these little things, and eager contenders for them, and placing great holiness in them, and distinguished from their Brethren only by them: It is almost a sure sign, that such men are either fools or knaves: Fools in being cheated by the great enemy to take up in little things, and scramble about
H 4 them,

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them, and in the mean time be diverted from those great things upon which Holiness and Salvation do depend: Or knaves in being exact in these, on purpose to conceal their failure in the other. These times let us see, that this is too commonly the real case, you shall rarely or never see, but there is some latent imperfection, where the paint and the outward dress is so extremely curious; for men never use so much art, as when they are purposing to deceive. Sincerity contents it self with a very plain garb, while no curiosity and care is thought too much for the Hypocrite.

2. Secondly, That we consider all these things too: For if we judge by some only, we may erre mightily here too. There are few men so bad, as not to be careful in some things, and to hope by those to expiate their disregard of others: And none but those that have never conversed with men, can but know how usual it is to have men hope, that one instance of vertue
shall

shall compensate for the want of another, and that one good deed shall excuse another sin. For so he that is a drunkard, can plead that he is just, and he that is unjust can alledge his fearing of an oath, and while either of these can do the one, they hope God will pardon them for being the other: This I take to be one great reason why so many halt in duty, and content themselves with a partial and imperfect obedience.

And as it is with single men, so it is commonly with aggregate Sects: There are few of these which are not mighty zealous for some good things, and by this hope either to conceal from men, or obtain pardon from God, for their remissness in others. So that we must be careful not to pass a judgment only by some few things, but to consider whether this pompous zeal and care extend it self equally to all both sins and duties, for if it do not, it is far from being that zeal that is according to Godliness; for that is a regular thing,

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thing, and hath an equal regard to every thing that is a duty, and an equal abhorrence of every thing that is a sin.

This is a thing of great advantage to be considered by us, and by it we may go near to discover almost all differences of men that are. It is a thing well worth the notice of men, to consider how the Catalogue of sins is lessened, and struck up into a very little room by most of the Sects among us at this day: who though they be great declaimers against the sins of the times, yet they mean commonly no more but swearing, and drunkenness, and whoredom, and murder by those sins: while covetousness and pride, faction and Schism, uncharitableness and censoriousness, and false accusing their Brethren; disobedience to superiors, and blaspheming dignities, and such like, are connived at, not censured as sins, or perhaps commended as innocent things. I do most heartily acknowledge the former are very ha-
nous

nous vices, and can never too much be declaimed against in an age so incident to them: But I know as well that the others too are sins as damning as they; and it argues but an ill spirit, and smells very rankly of hypocrisie, to cry out so much against the one, and yet hug and cherish and indulge the other.

And it fares no better with the Catalogue of duties, which is lessen'd by some men proportionably to the other, and the commandments reduced too at pleasure that do prescribe them. It hath been objected to the shame of Papists, that they have quite expunged the Second Precept of the First Table out of the Decalogue, and divided the Tenth to make up the number: And I think all honest men have just cause to condemn them for it: But upon the same reason that they are condemnable, are those too that expunge all the Six of the Second Table as some do, and the Fifth, Ninth and Tenth as almost all do, especially of those that infest us.

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It hath been long since observed how the Classis and the Conclave have exactly agreed in the violation of the Fifth Commandment; And in their doctrines about Government, and obedience to it: But I think it no great adventure to tell you, that not only these men, but every other Faction of what denomination soever amongst us do the same too. And if the old saying be true, that *ex ungue leonem*, then we may perhaps conjecture who hath had a hand in all these doctrines, and who doth indeed mostly symbolize with Papists, They or the Church of *England*, that they so much cry out against in this matter.

6. The Sixth and Last Rule is, that we consider holiness not only in its immediate act and exercise, but take in also the helps and advantages and encouragements to it: For there are many differences about doctrines that particularly respect these: And though they do not immediately concern the exercise of holiness, yet forasmuch
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as they relate to those things which relate to that exercise, and are great helps to it, therefore they are discernible by this Rule.

Thus (for instance) a doctrine that more lively represents the advantages of holiness and a good life : that more solidly evinceth the necessity of it : that adds more excellent and endearing encouragements to pursue it : that more fully assures a man of Divine aid and assistance in his endeavours after it ; I say doctrines that best do all or any of these things, have a good signature upon them, and bring with them a very great argument of their Divinity and Truth : And this is a very good reason upon which to prefer them before others, that either wholly fail to do these things, or at least come far short of the other for the solidity and clearness of doing so.

The truth is Sir, a very great many of doctrines about which men dispute and differ so eagerly at this day, may be decided clearly and safely by this Rule :

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Rule: particularly all the controversies stated by the Synod of *Dort*, and those that depend on them: It will be no hard matter for a man of a common capacity to discover clearly, which side of these questions gives the honourablest account of God Almighty, both as to his Attributes and dealings with the sons of men: which most magnifie his love, and grace, and goodness to his Creatures: which most clearly assert and reconcile his wisdom, and holiness, and justice, and goodness: which most honourably explain and state the Divine Philanthropy in the great acts of redemption performed by the Son of God: which most intelligently and consistently explain the three great offices of the holy *Jesus*: and fortifie the hopes of the sons of men in endeavouring after Salvation by all these.

Again, which of the two doth most solidly evince the necessity of holiness and a good life, and lay the more firm and assured foundation upon which

to superstruct that necessity: Which doth add the most pressing Arguments and Motives, and most rationally excite the endeavours of men after it: And lastly, which doth more lively encourage and animate those endeavours, with assurance of Divine assistance and aid, to help the infirmities, and supply the imperfections of them.

And by this may all the *Antinomian* Errors (which I take to be but the Tenets of the old *Gnosticks* newly revived) and all such wild opinions about Faith and Justification by it, &c. be clearly discerned and judged too: And to conclude, whatever doctrine fails in stating any of these things, which are so very necessary to encourage and help men in the way of goodness, may safely be rejected as an issue from the Spirit of Error.

I content my self Sir, only to give short touches on all these Rules, and to say only so much as may make the
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reasonableness of attending to them to appear: After which, every thing that might be added would appear tedious, and I think it not good manners to be burthenfom to any.

CHAP.

CHAP. X.

*Some Inferences made from this Collection,
particularly a Vindication of the Church
of England, which may challenge any
Sect at this day to joyn issue upon this
Principle.*

HAVING now given all needful assu-
rance to this Truth, and pre-
scribed the right and safe manage-
ment of it: I shall proceed to make an
inference or two from it, before I put
a period to this Discourse.

I. That it is very possible by attend-
ing to this Rule, to put a speedy end
and issue to all disputes that are in the
Christian world: And I am perswa-
ded,

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ded, there are no Rules we can proceed by, so probable to do this with effect, as this is: Nor any thing by which private Christians might so successfully secure themselves from all mortal Errors as by attending to this. And if the disputing men of the Age proceeded by this measure, and studied as much to expose the wickedness, as to display the falshood of Opinions, their labour would be less, and their success more: Men may sooner discern good from evil, than true from false: A little measure of knowledge and honesty, will enable men to do the first, but it requires a quick judgment sometimes to do the second; for falshood wears the mantle of truth, and many times it is no easie thing to discover the Impostor: And supposing men honest, they are more effectually convinced by the wickedness of an Opinion, than by any arguments of its untruth: For they do not know but men may impose upon them in these, but they can judge themselves in the other.

And

And I should think these two things were enough to recommend this way of determining controversies to the Scribes and the Disputers of this world: Since it would reduce the controversies to a narrow compass, and men would more effectually be concluded by a solid determination upon that issue: and consequently by this means they would sooner be ended.

1. For first, there are few people so impudent, and past shame, as to plead openly for *Baal*; and contend for doctrines that every one sees to be introductive of wickedness: Impostors generally take another course, and gild their Pills, and wrap their poisons in sweet and gay appearances; and let the Opinions they would promote be never so pernicious, yet they are always managed with mighty pretences of zeal and piety; and by this they hope to prevail more, than by all their subtil Arguments and fine

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Disputings; and indeed they do so, and simple honest people are easily entrapped by them, who have not time or skill, or both, to search into the bottom of all their doctrines: So that to encounter with them upon this, were to rob them of that in which their strength mostly lieth, it were to suit the Antidote to the Poison, and to disarm Heresie of that weapon by which it doth the most mischief; it were to uncase the Wolf, and shew what really he is, which would more affect men with horror and hatred of him, than ten thousand fine discourses about him would be able to do.

2. For secondly, blessed be God, men (especially that pretend Religion) are not so far debauched, but that they retain a veneration for piety and goodness, and a secret abhorrence of sin and profaneness: Many that live in the one, yet condemn themselves in it, and most men though far from being good themselves, yet have a secret

cret esteem and love for those that are :
And therefore when Errors are truly
discovered, and the impiety of them
made known, then the Net is spread
in the sight of the Bird, and men are
arm'd against the fine pleas, and the
enchanting pretences for them, and
are hardly proselyted into a belief of
them.

3. And thirdly, when the disputes
are brought to this issue, and the con-
test is upon it, and nothing left to de-
termine, but which doctrine tends to
make men holy, and which doth not
so; then the judgment and the deter-
mination is more easily made : For (as
I hinted before) the lines of duty are
plain, and not so subject to those va-
rieties of mistakes that other things
are : Almost all practical things are
plain, and easily understood, unless it
be in some rare cases : And for the
most part disputes and questions about
them, do more perplex and intangle,
than they do unfold and explain them :

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About these every honest man is in a good measure able to instruct himself, supposing him to have any competent knowledge, and better able to judge, than he is of questions that are curiously managed, with great skill and art on both sides.

4. And fourthly, for Controversies and Disputes that no way concerned holiness, or related to it, men would soon perceive them to be impertinent and needless, and the pursuing of them to minister only to Faction and Vanity: and so would concern themselves neither one way or other about them; but let them fall to the ground, with as little notice taken of them, as there was reason to start them.

2. But the great design of these Papers, and therefore the chief Inference I intend from this Subject, is for the Vindication of the Church of *England*, and of the Reformed Religion professed by it. To this Rule it may most
safely

safely appeal, and not fear to be tried by it: And as Bishop Sanderson saith, *The God that answereth by Fire let him be God.* If amongst all competitions and contending Sects among us, there be any to be found that doth exceed, or equal her for conformity to this Rule, they shall readily have the right hand of fellowship, and due precedence yielded to them: And I challenge any of them all to joyn issue with her upon this principle. And certainly this is a very fair offer, since all the Separations amongst us have been commenced upon this pretence: They have first separated from her, and then from each other, upon pretences of impurity in her Communion, and in quest of greater purity still.

If a man therefore offer to make good these two things:

1. That there is no reason at all for Separation upon this account; nor just cause to object unholiness and impurity against her: Let her Articles

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and Homilies be examin'd, her Liturgy as closely considered as may be: and if there be any thing in either contrary to holiness, then condemn her and spare not, she will (I am sure) acknowledge her error, and patiently endure a reproof for it. But I desire any man living to do this, provided he exercise but any measure of charity and honesty in expounding things: and do not imitate the severity of that Heathen *Momus*, who rather than find no fault in the Picture of *Venus*, would quarrel with her slip-shoe, and whose Motto in hunting for faults is, *Aut inveniam aut faciam*.

2. That all and every of those ways, and forms of Religion that these men have deflected unto, are much inferior to her in this matter: and may clearly be detected to be false by this Rule, since every one of them espouseth doctrines which either immediately, or in their just consequences are introductive of wickedness, and contrary to

to holiness in some instance or other.

He, I say, that offers to make good both these things, as he will do a good service to the Church, so he will do that which may justly shame and reproach the several contending Factions that have so unjustly and unreasonably separated from her: Now these are truths which no man need fear undertaking to make good, and perhaps a *specimen* of them may ere long appear.

In the mean time I think it mine own, and intimate it as the duty of others too, to bless God, and give him our heartiest praise, that hath caused us to be brought up in such a Church whose Faith is truly Christian and Primitive, and that Faith which is according to Godliness, whose Worship is truly Pious, and Grave, and Serious as such should be: All whose Doctrines and Articles, whose Offices
and

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and Ceremonies are truly adapted to promote the same amongst all her Votaries: And if Salvation be to be had in Communion with any Church in the World, I am sure it is in such an One.

And to this to add a serious resolution to adhere stedfastly to the same, and not permit our selves, like fools and children to be turned to and fro with every slight of doctrine, by cunning and designing men: whose Interest or whose Passion, and some pitiful low design oblige them to defame and destroy her, and to make Factions and Rents in her, as the most certain methods unto both.

And (to conclude this Inference) when we are importuned and solicited by any of these, and take upon us to judge of the Doctrines offer'd to us, let us not so much consider the fine pleas that subtil men make for them, but bring them to this touchstone, and try

try them honestly and carefully by it,
and we shall soon satisfie our selves,
and find enough to preserve us against
the infection of them, and as S. John
saith, *Hereby know the Spirit of Truth
and the Spirit of Error.*

The

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The Conclusion.

AND now Sir, I have finished that trouble which I intend to give you at this time. I am very sensible, that besides the imperfections attending what I have done, there are two or three things greatly wanting to complete this design, and worthy of a larger consideration, being but only lightly touched in these Papers,

1. To Vindicate all the Articles in the Christian Faith by this Rule, and shew the conduciveness of each to the great purpose of Holiness.

2. Secondly, To joyn issue with all Heresies, and the considerable Sects and Opinions that disturb the peace of the

the Church at present, upon this question: and try if the Principles of them all be not condemnable by this Rule.

But Sir, these are things which will take up more time than at present I can spare to them. And I am willing to see how you resent this that I have done, before I burthen you with more. But to let you see how wholly I am at your command, provided you remit me to my own time (as I am sure you will) I promise to do in these what you think fit to require of me: Being extremely desirous in every thing so to acquit my self, as may secure me the reputation and honour of being

Your most humble Servant.

FINIS.